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A MATURE ATTITUDE TOWARD USAGE. LANGUAGE CURRICULUM VI, STUDENT VERSION.

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THIS LANGUAGE UNIT ON USAGE FOR 12TH-GRADE STUDENTS IS DIVIDED INTO SIX SECTIONS--"INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDENTS," "USAGE IN THE HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH CLASS," "VARIATIONS WITHIN STANDARD AMERICAN ENGLISH," "BASES FOR JUDGMENTS ABOUT USAGE," AND "CHARACTERISTICS OF A MATURE ATTITUDE TOWARD USAGE." FOUR EXERCISES, SOME WITH MULTIPLE PARTS, DIRECT THE STUDENT (1) TO EXAMINE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN AMERICAN AND BRITISH ENGLISH, AMONG AMERICAN DIALECTS, AND AMONG USAGES ON VARYING SOCIAL LEVELS, (2) TO IDENTIFY THE USAGE LEVELS OF NUMEROUS EXPRESSIONS, (3) TO ANALYZE A SPECIFIC EXPRESSION, THE USAGE LEVEL OF WHICH IS NOT READILY APPARENT, AND (4) TO DEFINE "GOOD ENGLISH." SEE ALSO ED 010 129 THROUGH ED 010 160, ED 010 803 THROUGH ED 010 832, TE 000 195 THROUGH TE 000 220, AND TE 000 227 THROUGH TE 000 249. (RD)

Student Version

A MATURE ATTITUDE TOWARD USAGE

Language Curriculum VI

I. Introduction to the Student

Writers and speakers often ask themselves "Should I use this expression in this particular situation?" or "Is this good English?" Many writers--especially high school students--seem to have little confidence in their ability to answer these questions accurately. Some are afraid to write anything at all, simply because they are afraid of making errors. These same students, on the other hand, show no lack of confidence in their ability to use language when they are talking to friends and family. They actually seem to enjoy using their native language in these informal situations. Have you ever wondered what it is that makes a person so afraid of committing errors in writing and yet permits him to talk for hours without worrying at all about such things?

Some people feel that only English teachers (and perhaps a few other persons) know how to answer questions about correct English. Somehow, the English teacher is supposed to have had correct English drilled into him during his university days. Just let an English teacher approach a group of students (or even adults), and someone is sure to comment that "We better be careful of what we say." To consider "good English" as something only an English teacher knows is, of course, unrealistic. Such an attitude is based upon a misconception of what "good English" really is. Millions of people all over the world write and speak good English every day, and only a very small percentage of them are teachers of English.

What does the term "good English" mean? In the minds of some people, "good English" is only the Received Standard English spoken and written by cultivated Englishmen. To these people, nearly all Americans, Canadians, and Australians speak "bad" English. Others think that only the English spoken and written by those with a university education is "good English." Still others feel that "good English" is the kind spoken by the influential people in their own community or city. Each of these attitudes indicates that the word "good" is being interpreted in a very narrow sense. Some people even call such attitudes "linguistic snobbery."

What, then, is "good English"? Is the language of the university-educated person really the only "good English" spoken and written in our country? Is the word good necessarily synonymous with Standard English--the kind of language taught in our schools, spoken and written by educated people, and used in the important affairs of our country? Or is "good" a term that can apply to other kinds of writing and speaking? Is the following passage "good English"?

The project reported herein was supported through the Cooperative Research Program of the Office of Education, U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

> Once or twice of a night we would see a steamboat slipping along in the dark, and now and then she would belch a whole world of sparks up out of her chimbleys, and they would rain down in the river and look awful pretty; then she would turn a corner and her lights would wink out and her pow-wow shut off and leave the river still again; and by-and-by her waves would get to us, a long time after she was gone, and joggle the raft a bit, and after that you wouldn't hear nothing for you couldn't tell how long, except maybe frogs or something.

There are items in this quotation that mark it as being the language of an uneducated person: chimbleys, awful pretty, and you wouldn't hear nothing, for example. But is this language effective in getting across to the reader a picture of night on the Mississippi and Huck Finn's feelings about it? Why? Would you like it as much if it had been written in the way an educated person might speak?

> Once or twice a night we would see a steamboat slipping along in the dark, and now and then she would belch a whole world of sparks up out of her chimneys, and they would rain down in the river and look extremely pretty; then she would turn a corner and her lights would wink out and the noise would disappear and leave the river still again; and after a while her waves would get to us, a long time after she was gone and rock the raft a little, and after that you wouldn't hear anything for a long time, except for the frogs.

You will probably agree that the passage is more effective as Mark Twain wrote it. If he had written his book in the English of educated people it probably wouldn't have become the classic it is today because the language would not have fit the situation nor the characters. In other words it would not have been appropriate. Perhaps you remember other scenes from the book which, like the one above, are "good" English in the sense of "effective," but which are not Standard English for Huck's time or our own. Does Huck's use of Substandard English (those dialects which differ from the prestige dialects) mark him as being unintelligent or morally "bad"? Where did Huck learn his language? Did he have a choice as to which kind of English he learned as a child? Since language is learned by every child from his own parents and other associates, it would seem a bit unfair to label Huck as "stupid" or "bad" simply because he spoke a particular kind of English. Can you think of an instance where you thought a person spoke effectively even though he used substandard pronunciations and word forms?

In this unit, from this point onwards, the term "good" English will mean "effective" English. You will continue to encounter in many other places, however, the word good used as a synonym for Standard English. The point that you should understand is this: Language can be good in any dialect, standard or substandard, if it is appropriate for the occasion and speaker and if it is effective.

The word dialect may need definition. A dialect is a variety of a language which differs from other varieties of the same language in matters of vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar. Linguists speak of national (or continental) varieties of English such as British, Australian, and American, and they speak of regional dialects within these national dialects. For instance, within the United States there are three main regional varieties--Northern, Midland, and Southern--which differ considerably among themselves, although not as much as the regional dialects of Great Britain do. Divisions within a society--call them social classes, if you want to--bring about other varieties of language which are called social dialects. Thus we can speak of Huck Finn's language as being an American Midland regional dialect and a substandard social dialect. Within any one of these regional and social dialects, there is a wide range of differences, especially in the spoken language. Standard Written English, whether it is written by an educated Englishman or American, Northerner or Southerner, is very much the same from country to country and from region to region. This uniformity of Standard Written English, especially the more formal varieties, is one of the main reasons why you are taught Standard Written English in school; it can be used over a wide geographical area and for an infinite number of purposes.

But what about the problem expressed in the opening question: "Should I use this word in this particular situation?" Even if you happen to be a person living, let us say, in the Southern United States and speaking the standard dialect of that region, it is not always easy to decide which word or expression is "best" for every speaking or writing situation. When making a speech at a large public gathering, for instance, is it proper to use expressions such as "who are you asking?" "drive slow," "it looks like it will rain," "I want for you to do it." "different than," "the reason . . . is because," or "I cannot help but . . ."? Should any or all of these same expressions be used in an article written for publication in a literary magazine? Should they be used in a letter to someone you know quite well? Or are these expressions appropriate just for informal conversations like those you have at school during lunchtime? You, the speaker must decide in each case whether the expression fits the situation or not. If it does fit it can be called "good" English for that situation. What you want to know, of course, is how to tell when it fits.

Up to this point, the discussion has implied that you, as a writer or speaker, want to know what the appropriate expressions are. Just exactly what is it that makes writers and speakers eager to choose the appropriate forms? Have you found out for yourself that the use of certain "inappropriate" language stirs up an unpleasant reaction in your audience at times? What judgments about you are sometimes made, simply on the basis of the language you use? Or turn the situation around: What judgments do you make, for example, about a person who says, "Them childrens ain't her'n"? Can you think of examples of how groups behave toward those who do not speak "their kind of language"? Why are you, as a writer or speaker, so concerned with making the "right" choices in the use of language? For one thing you are very much aware of the fact that inappropriate choices of language are marked in red pencil

when they appear in papers written for your English teacher. But what sorts of reactions does your use of "bad" (inapropriate) English have upon the people among whom you live and work and play? These reactions are far more important to you than any red-pencil comment or grade on a school writing assignment. Finally, you might ask yourself whether these reactions to your use of language are always fair or reasonable.

Let us assume, then, that for several reasons you want to put your best linguistic foot forward. You want to use language that does not call attention to itself and represents the best way you can say or write something. Does this necessarily mean that one kind of language will do for all situations? A moment's thought will probably convince you that you change your language to bring it into line with the situation in which you find yourself. The vocabulary and even the pronunciation and grammar of the language you use at a school basketball game differ from the language you use when you answer a question in the classroom or when you write a paper for your English teacher. Your language varies, and you are usually aware that it does.

What we have been discussing here is usage. It is an important part of your education, since every time you write or speak you reveal your knowledge of English usage. This unit is intended to help you determine what your own attitude toward the problem of usage is. In a way, you are developing your own philosophy of language. This philosophy is reflected in your responses to questions like "What is good English?" or what expression should I use in this particular situation?"

One distinction which should perhaps be made at this point is the distinction between grammar and usage, because many people often confuse the two. Much of your study of language in the last few years has been concerned with finding out about the structure of the sentences of your language. You have learned something about the basic parts of the English sentence and how they are organized. This is a study of grammar. It involves the kind of descriptive rules which enable you to draw a diagram of a sentence. At the very bottom of the diagram you make lexical choices. And it is at this point that usage is involved. You know, for example, that every sentence has a noun phrase and a verb phrase. You might say He and I are going," where He and I would be the noun phrase. Someone who speaks a substandard dialect might say "Him and me are going." His choices for the noun phrase would be different from yours. But the structure of his sentence and of yours would be the same. In other words, grammar is concerned with the whole structure; usage is concerned with choices at a very low level in the diagram of the sentence.

II. Usage in the High School English Class

During your years in high school, you have probably become familiar with some kind of English handbook, a manual for writers and speakers. What sorts of things are found in your handbook under the heading usage?

Does it include statements about correct and incorrect pronunciation? Does it include lists of acceptable word forms, along with warnings to avoid substandard forms like blowed, clumb, or ain't? Does it also mention groups of words that are to be preferred such as "different from" "identical with," and "in regard to"? The items mentioned above (as well as many other related items) are traditionally what has been called usage. The English handbook describes those forms that are acceptable in Standard American English, the dialect spoken and written by educated and influential people in the various parts of America. This handbook serves a very important purpose, since one of the major jobs of the school is to give you some control of the standard dialect, the kind of language used in carrying on the important affairs of our country.

Many students entering high school have good control of the spoken standard dialect, but very few have achieved the same degree of skill with Standard Written English. It is with written English that you probably need most help. Is the English handbook all that you need when trying to answer the question, "Should I write this in this particular situation?" The handbook lists many of the most commonly misused items of Standard English, but it usually makes no attempt to list all the standard forms. Similarly, the handbook mentions a few words or expressions which are substandard, but it makes no attempt to catalogue all substandard forms. Another available source of information about usage is, of course, a dictionary. Contrary to what some people say (for instance, "If it's in the dictionary, it's O.K."), most dictionaries do contain both standard and substandard forms. Dictionary makers use labels such as substandard, nonstandard, obsolete, archaic, slang, and dialect to indicate the restrictions upon the use of words and pronunciations which are listed along with the standard forms. Thus these labels give you information about the kinds of speaking and writing situations where the labeled words are now used. What, for example, do you infer about those words which are listed without usage labels? The absence of a usage label has a significance, also.

But even these two handy references--the handbook and the dictionary --cannot provide all the information you need when you are trying to decide whether or not to use a particular word or expression. You can always ask the teacher for help if you are writing in class, but you should probably aim for independence rather than relying upon others to make judgments for you. Let us say, for instance, that you want to know whether to use toward or towards in an essay assigned in the English class. A dictionary will probably list both forms as Standard English, perhaps with some additional information identifying towards as the more common form in British English. You may choose either form and be equally "correct." Similarly, both proved and proven are standard forms in constructions with be or have, with the former occurring more frequently. Choices between two or more standard expressions are not always made this easily. For example, should you use pretty as an adverb meaning 'moderately,' 'somewhat,' 'tolerably,' or 'in some degree' in your English essay, as in I feel pretty good, His paper was pretty bad? Should you use it in conversations where Standard English is expected of you? In this instance, you have to distinguish between

what is acceptable in Written Standard and Spoken Standard English and what is appropriate in formal and informal situations. Pretty, in the adverbial use defined above, is well established as a part of informal Standard English. In more formal varieties of writing and speech, this use of pretty is not common. Based on the evidence given above, is such a use of pretty appropriate for an English essay? No one else can take the responsibility of making this judgment, just as no one else is responsible for the kind of clothes you choose to wear. If your reader or listener disapproves of your choices, he draws conclusions about you and your use of English, not about some "authority" who may have given you advice.

It appears, then, that it is impossible for English teachers to give you any reference or list of do's and don't's which will always save you the job of making choices from among the possible ways of saying things. Making decisions requires the use of judgment, and making decisions about language is no exception to the rule. Usage problems can be made to seem less difficult, however, if you look at English usage in a certain way. First of all, you need to recognize that there is a wide range of tolerance within the dialect that we call Standard American English. In other words, it is not an easily defined set of language habits, but a very complex one. Secondly, you must understand the bases upon which people make statements about English usage. That is, you should know how the student of usage goes about trying to decide what is "standard" and what is not. Finally, you need to recognize that the conventions of language, like other customary behavior, also change wiht the passage of time. The manners and dress of the 1890's are not in fashion today. Similarly, the Standard English of Colonial America is not the same as the Standard English of today. The remainder of this unit deals more thoroughly with each of these three ideas.

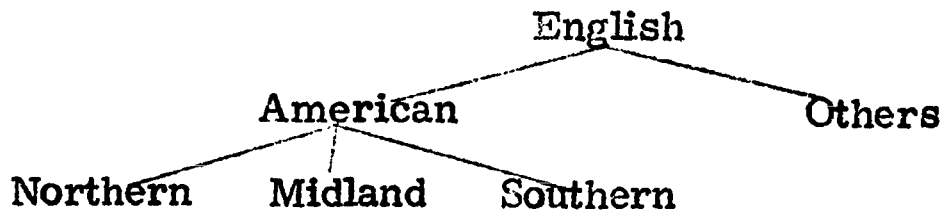
III. Variations Within Standard American English

Many usage problems will simply not come up if you recognize that there is not just one kind of Standard English, but several. To say it another way, two different forms or expressions can both be "right." The habit of dividing verb forms, spellings, or pronunciations, for instance, into two neat piles, the "correct" ones and the "mistakes," is a tendency you must resist. You must resist it because it represents an over-simplification of the actual facts of language usage. The word above, for example, when used as an adjective (the above list) or a noun (the above will indicate), has sometimes been condemned as "bad" English despite the fact the word is commonly used in legal and business writing of unquestionable quality. Some members of the "either-or" school object to all uses of the word dove (past of dive), branding it as an "error." The fact that dove is the preferred form in the speech of educated New Englanders seems to have little weight when balanced against the fact that dived is the most common form in Standard Written English. Any classification of items of usage containing only two categories, the right and the wrong, will obviously be inadequate for describing the actual facts of English usage.

If you were to figure out a system of classification that would sort out and organize the facts of usage, how many categories would you need? What variations within our standard language would need to be accounted for? Let us use a branching diagram to represent the different varieties. What does the following diagram say about the entity we call English?

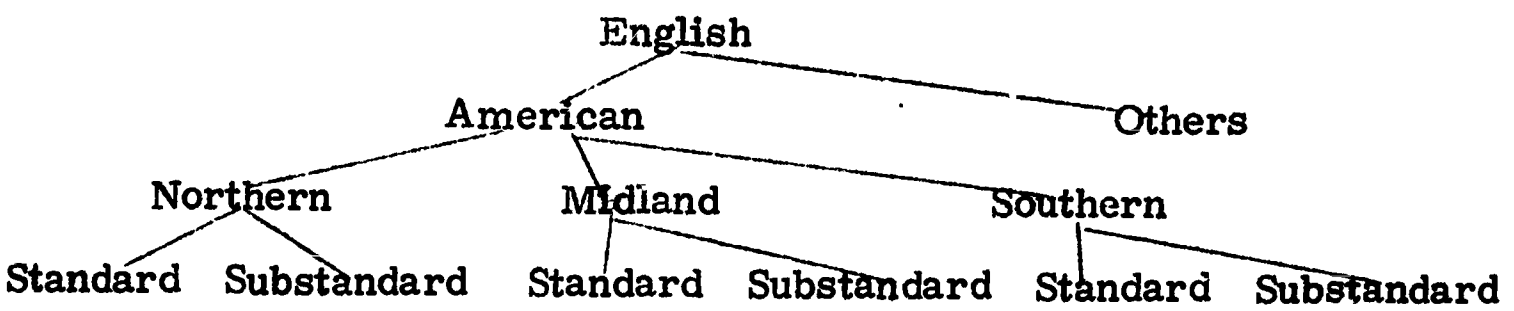
Whether we are classifying information about usage, grammar, history, or some other aspect of the English language, we must recognize national (or continental) variations. Educated Londoners will prefer the verb got (en form of get) to the form gotten, He has got a new car. and they prefer pronunciations like /ʃedyul/ for schedule and spellings like honour and colour. However, despite the many differences between British and American standard dialects, they are also very much alike, as you can tell when you read British magazines or hear English statesmen speaking on television or radio. But, because we live in America, we are especially concerned with distinguishing variations within American --not British or Canadian English.

Variations within what we have called American English require further subdivision of our national dialect. Does usage (that is, word forms, pronunciation, etc.) vary from one part of the United States to another? What illustrations can you think of? The example given earlier, the en form of dive, is a good one. Educated Southerners, among others, say and write dived, not dove. In the Northeast, and in the northern United States generally, educated people usually say dove but write dived. South of a line running roughly through New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, and southwestern Pennsylvania, educated people usually pronounce the word greasy with a /z/ sound, /grizi/. North of this line, the /z/ pronunciation becomes less common, and finally the pronunciation with /s/ becomes the most common one. (What do you say?) Regional variations like this have led linguists to identify at least three large dialect areas in the eastern United States: Northern, Midland, and Southern. Each regional dialect is, of course, made up of many sub-varieties, and you should realize that the terms Northern, Midland, and Southern are simply handy ways of talking about very complex variations in American English. We can now expand our branching diagram to account for regional variations:



You may have noticed that when we refer to the occurrence of certain pronunciations or verb forms we have used terms such as "in the speech of educated Southerners" or "in the writing of educated Americans."

These qualifications suggest still further subdivisions of American English dialects. Do educated people in your region speak and write differently from those who have had less schooling than they or from those who belong to other social groups in your community? In large cities, for example, it is clear that the members of some social groups share a set of language habits that are largely a result of the company these people keep. That is, people tend to speak and write like those they live and work with. Linguists call language differences of this kind social dialects. Although there are obviously more than two social dialects in most communities, we will identify only (1) Standard, the dialect of those Americans who in general carry on the important affairs of our country, and (2) Substandard, those dialects which differ from that of the prestige group defined above. Substandard English, then, is characterized by forms like hisself, their'n, hain't, clum, and blowed--words that do not occur in the speech or writing of educated people in any region. Since one of your jobs in school is to learn the standard dialect, we will concern ourselves with that particular social dialect, even though we know that substandard dialects have their own kind of complexity. Our branching diagram can now indicate the variations within any regional dialect:



Instead of one kind of Standard American English, we now see that there are at least three. This is not like the situation in Great Britain, for instance, where there is just one prestige dialect, the Received Standard Pronunciation or simply R.P. If you question the existence of more than one American Standard dialect, think back over the kinds of dialects spoken by our last five American Presidents: Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman, Dwight Eisenhower, John Kennedy, and Lyndon Johnson.

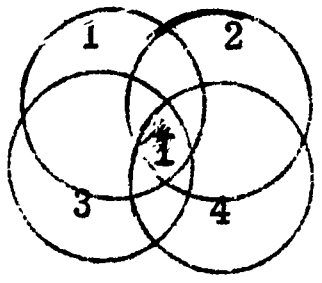
Exercise 1

Part A: List any word forms, pronunciations, vocabulary items, or spellings which distinguish British English from American English. For example, the pronunciation of words like fertile, laboratory, and fast, vocabulary items such as petrol and lorry, and spellings like cheque, mould, and favour serve to identify British English. The introductory section of your dictionary may list such items.

Part B: List any word forms, pronunciations, and vocabulary items that serve to identify regional varieties of American English. The pronoun form you-all (used when speaking to a group) has regional restrictions, as do the past tense forms of the verb dive. Pronunciation of the words can't, sentence, barn, and greasy and the occurrence of

words like bucket and pail. branch and brook, or andirons, and fire dogs all show regional variation. Since some of your classmates may know many more dialect items than you do, it might be better if the class prepared one list together.

Part C: Try to illustrate the variations within American English by means of a series of overlapping circles rather than branching diagrams. For instance, the relationships between British, American, Australian, and Canadian English could be shown as follows:



1. British English
2. American
3. Australian
4. Canadian

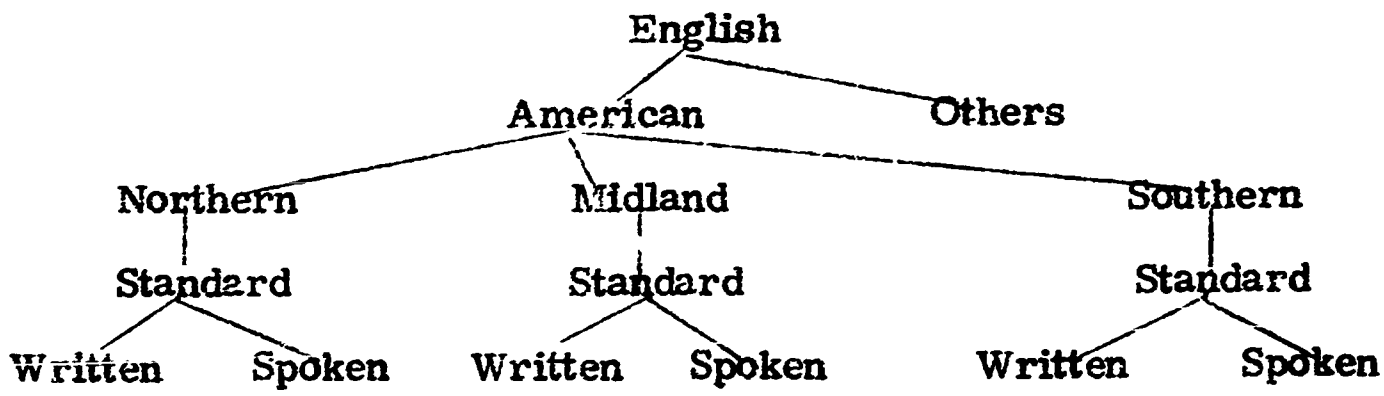
The shaded area in the center (1.) could be said to stand for the language features which all four national dialects have in common. Each one has some features which none of the others have, and any two of them may share features which the other two do not have. Your diagram should have at least three circles to stand for the major regional dialects in American English.

Other Variations in American English. Thus far we have identified a number of varieties of American English: both standard and sub-standard varieties of Northern, Midland, and Southern American English --a total of six different kinds. Nothing has been said about the variations within the other national dialects of English, although it is clear that such sub-dialects exist. To return to American English, let us see whether the possibilities of subdividing these dialects have been exhausted.

No one writes exactly as he speaks. Most people would agree that this is a valid statement about their use of language. An obvious exception to this generalization is the situation in which a writer is attempting to reproduce exactly the way a character speaks, as in writing a short story or novel. In most writing and speech, however, you can probably detect variations in usage that are the result of the author's choice of medium--his decision to communicate orally or by means of pencil and paper. The expression "It wasn't me" is a particularly useful illustration of this difference between written and spoken standards of usage. Records of what is actually said by educated people from all three dialect areas in the eastern United States show that me occurs in this expression more frequently than I, except in New England where the usage is divided. The occurrence of me and I shows just the opposite pattern in the writing of educated people. I, rather than me, is used in published writing, although "It is me" and "It wasn't me" probably occurs frequently in less formal writing such as personal letters. "He don't" is another example of the difference between the standards of speech and writing. Records of several investigations show that educated people in the Middle Atlantic States and the South Atlantic States regularly say

"He don't" in informal speaking situations. In other regions usage is divided between "He doesn't" and "He don't." In writing, however, the expression "He don't" is rarely used by an educated person, except in very informal writing situations like personal correspondence. Both of these expressions--"It wasn't me" and "He don't"--are usually labeled as substandard in dictionaries without any indication of the situations where such a label would apply.

If we can agree, for the moment, that within each regional standard dialect there is a difference between the usage found in speech and that found in writing, we can add one more level of branchings to our diagram.



Note that we have omitted the substandard dialects in each of the regions, since our primary interest here is with the standard dialects. How many different varieties of Standard American English have been identified? Suddenly it seems that the term Standard American English represents a more complex set of language habits than you might have imagined. But there is one more level of complexity yet to be examined.

By the time you reached high school, you had at your command at least two--perhaps more--kinds of English that you used habitually when either speaking or writing. If you happen to be a particularly versatile user of language, you might have had as many as four varieties at your command. We are not talking here about regional or social variations, but about variations within the dialect of any individual who speaks and writes the standard dialect of any region. Let us look at a few illustrations before we try to name these varieties.

In an elegant hotel, the elevator operator might say to a group of very important guests, "Please be careful when stepping from the elevator." Obviously, this represents his most formal kind of speech; he is trying to display his best "linguistic manners." When speaking to ordinary guests of the hotel, he might say, "Watch your step when you get out of the elevator." The same person might say to someone he has known for a long time, "Look out there, Jack. Don't trip." As the familiarity with the audience increases, the formality of the language decreases. Like other kinds of etiquette, linguistic etiquette varies with the situation.

You can probably think of times when you noticed that your own

language changed with the formality or informality of the situation. Let us say that you are helping your parents entertain guests at your home. It is your job to answer the door and help the guests with their coats and hats. When the president of the company that employs your father arrives, for example, you might say to him, "May I help you with your coat and hat, Mr. _____?" A little later, a less imposing person--a neighbor--arrives. You feel a bit more at ease around him, since you have seen him before, but you are far from being a close friend of his. You might say to him, "Can I take your coat for you. Mr. _____?" Notice the shift from the very formal may to the less formal can. Next, your uncle Harry arrives. With him you feel very much at ease. You might say to him, "Let me take your coat for you, Harry." A little later, your best pal from school arrives (without his parents), and you say, "How about your coat?" You have sensed that each situation calls for a slightly different kind of language, and your guests more than likely feel properly greeted. Your pal would have sensed something wrong, or at least strained, if you had greeted him with "May I help you with your coat?" Similarly, your father's employer might have drawn some uncomplimentary conclusions about you and your parents if you had said to him, "How about your coat?"

The same sort of adjustments take place in your writing. The formal statement often found in some correspondence, "Your attention in this matter is sincerly appreciated," has no place in a note to a close friend or a menber of your own family. A statement like "Thanks for helping me out" would be far more appropriate. Notice that you do not shift your dialect from standard to substandard (from good to bad, in the view of some people), but you simply use another variety of Standard English. Educated people do not, as some handbooks seem to suggest, go around talking or writing the same way in all situations. Like the versatile person in any activity, linguistically versatile persons "shift gears" and use the kind of language that is most suitable for the thing they are trying to say and for the audience they are trying to reach.

The different styles of English have been identified and named by one American linguist, Martin Joos. Joos's five "clocks" --as he calls different styles of language--are (1) frozen,[a] (2) formal, (3) consultative, (4) casual, and (5) intimate. The latter four are the ones you will try to identify. Formal style is the one used for public addresses, for published writing, for lectures. It is the style used by the President of the United States for example when he makes his inaugural address. You probably make little use of this style except in certain kinds of

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[a]Frozen style is the style of good literature; it bears rereading, rethinking, and refeeling. However, literary style is not relevant to the discussion at this point.

writing. Consultative style is a kind of middle ground; it is the one used habitually with strangers, that is, in situations where the speaker and listener(s) know little about each other. The speaker has to provide background information as he goes along, since the listener is an outsider. Casual style, on the other hand, lets the listener know that he is an insider. The speaker uses slang and shortened expressions that his friends are familisr with, and he assumes that little or no background information needs to be supplied. The last style, the one labeled intimate, is the kind of language we use in the privacy of our own homes among those who know us best: our brothers and sisters, our parents, our very closest associates. Intimate style, which may seem especially brief and almost incomprehensible to an outsider, does not deal with public information. The speaker trims his utterances down to the bare bones. Since we use intimate style only with those we know best, we assume the listener will be able to make sense out of expressions like "Nuts," "Cold," and so forth. The last three styles are seen in the following variations of the consultative expression, "Are you ready to leave?"

Casual style -- "Ready to go?"

Intimate style -- "Ready?"

To which style (or styles) would you assign each of the following?

(a) What would you like to eat?
(b) What do you want to eat?
(c) What can I fix for you?
(d) Fix something for you?
(e) What do you wish to eat?
(f) What do you desire for lunch?

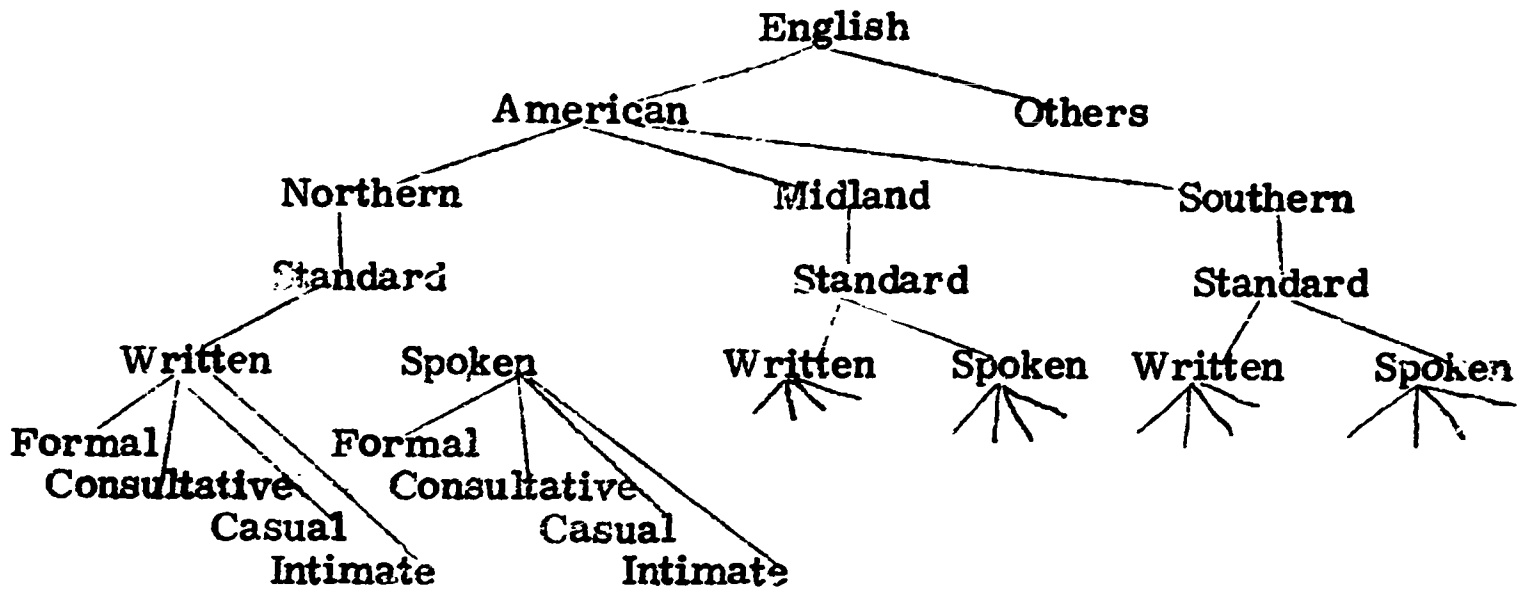
You would probably agree that (e) and (f) are too formal for use in your own home among members of the family. Servants and waiters often use the more formal styles, since serving the public demands a certain formality, at least in the more elegant restaurants. Questions (a) -- (d) represent varying levels of informality. Can you think of other variations of this question? Which styles do you find in the following groups of sentences?

(a) Go to the nearest exit!
(b) Get out!
(c) Please leave immediately!
(d) Beat it!
(e) Scram!
(f) Go on!

(a) Can I help you?
(b) Want some help?
(c) Help you?
(d) May I help you?
(e) May I serve you?
(f) Want something?

It is not likely that you will agree exactly with your classmates' classification of these items, but the differences in judgment will probably not be extreme. The biggest problem will be distinguishing between casual and intimate styles.

If we add this last set of variations to our branching diagram, it will look something like this:



How many different kinds of Standard American English are classified in this diagram? Is it likely that there is a lot of overlap among these varieties? In other words, is it likely that a particular expression would occur in several of these final subdivisions? John Kennedy's statement, "We must never negotiate out of fear. But we must never fear to negotiate," would probably be appropriate in formal writing anywhere in the United States, but his actual pronunciation of this sentence would be restricted to formal or consultative Northern American speech. A statement such as "School bugs me" could be assigned to the casual writing of people living anywhere in the United States, but the actual pronunciation of it might limit it to one region or another.

Selecting from among the many kinds of Standard American English is the problem of the writer and speaker. Knowing something about usage is knowing when to use one expression and not another. What is involved in choosing between expressions like "Those are his" and "Them is his'n"? Obviously the latter is not characteristic of Standard American English in any region. Such choices are matters of usage; however, they involve not choices from among possible standard variations, but choices between standard and substandard forms. You may want to use substandard forms for a particular effect in some situations, but you should do so knowingly. For instance, you might use ain't when speaking in a situation normally calling for Standard English if you want to get a laugh or if you want to affect a "folksy" manner. Political leaders sometimes intentionally use substandard dialects when campaigning in certain parts of their home districts, since Standard English would seem out of place there. The individual is using his linguistic versatility here for his own ends, and there seems to be evidence that such use of language pays off. Can you think of others who use their versatility in language as a means of making a living or "getting ahead"? Do some television comedians fall into this category?

This discussion of varieties of American English has been aimed at making one point very clear: the range of tolerance within Standard American English is much broader than the "right-or-wrong" philosophy of language suggests. This range of tolerance includes, for example, the casual Southern expression "How are you-all?" as well as the formal language of "The Ambassador requests that you reply by letter." Educated Americans speak and write in a variety of dialects and styles; they do not have a single standard to which they all must gear their speech and writing. As a student living within a particular region, you should know the range of possibilities within your own regional standard --all the way from the informal speech which you learned very early to the more formal written styles which are more difficult to learn.

Exercise 2

Assign the following list of expressions to a particular style or styles. That is, indicate by a check (✓) the styles in which the following expressions would be acceptable (or standard) in your own region of the United States. If you feel that the expression is not acceptable in any of the Standard styles (that is, educated people do not say or write it) put a check (✓) in the right-hand column labeled substandard. As an illustration of what you are exprected to do, the first three items have been marked according to the judgment of a resident of the Pacific Northwest.

No.	STANDARD AMERICAN ENGLISH								SUBSTANDARD
	WRITTEN				SPOKEN				
	formal	consultative	casual	intimate	formal	consultative	casual	intimate	
1.									
2.			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
4.									
5.									
6.									
7.									
8.									
9.									
10.									
11.									
12.									
13.									
14.									
15.									
16.									
17.									
18.									
19.									
20.									
21.									
22.									
23.									
24.									
25.									
26.									
27.									
28.									
29.									
30.									

	STANDARD AMERICAN ENGLISH (cont.)								
	WRITTEN				SPOKEN				SUBSTANDARD
No.	formal	consultative	casual	intimate	formal	consultative	casual	intimate	
31.									
32.									
33.									
34.									
35.									
36.									
37.									
38.									
39.									
40.									
41.									
42.									
43.									
44.									
45.									
46.									
47.									
48.									
49.									
50.									

1. Him and me did the work.
2. The boys dove into the pool.
3. The ship drifted towards the rocks.
4. He acts like a judge.
5. All the farther he got was Second Avenue.
6. He went pretty far for an amateur.
7. It wasn't her.
8. The officer said it to us boys.
9. We was just going home.
10. They claimed I was late, while actually I had arrived before opening time.
11. I want to more than make up for my mistakes.
12. They always eat boughten bread.
13. He would never behave like the others did.
14. He does it different than I do.
15. They simply didn't take care of theirselves.
16. The reason I left school was because I didn't have enough money.
17. The teachers objected to me being sent home.
18. They plan to pick up Bill and myself at the station.
19. I suspicion that everything is all right.
20. They did not like his going along.
21. Who did you invite to your party.
22. No one could determine for whom they were looking.
23. Everyone brought their own lunch.
24. The data is still being processed.
25. He couldn't hardly breathe in the smoke.
26. Neither the paper nor the ink were satisfactory.
27. He don't like to work.
28. They never found the one he had given it to.
29. Drive slow!
30. There were less people here this year.
31. You had better come back later.
32. None of the girls wanted to be her.
33. Everyone felt badly after the race was over.
34. No one knows if he has gone home or not.
35. I'm right, ain't I?
36. If we are not careful, the grass is liable to cover the flowers.
37. My typewriter is as good, if not better than yours.
38. I only asked him to leave.
39. Swollen by the heavy rains, the workman could not move the logs.
40. You have got to get going before dawn.
41. The broom was in back of the door.
42. No one will ever know but what she was innocent.
43. The soldiers laid down and slept.
44. When you go to Washington D.C., you are always surprised by its size
45. Due to Jim's error, the game was lost.
46. Some parents do not raise their children properly.
47. They live further east than I do.
48. Can I leave before the bell rings today?
49. None of the soldiers was hurt by the blast.
50. If I was you, I would ask for a transfer.

IV. Changes in Standards of Usage

Would it be possible for someone to write a complete description of Standard English usage that would serve for all time to come? Why? or why not? What facts do you know about language which required you to answer that question in the way you did? Which of the following expressions would you accept as appropriate English for an essay you are writing in your English class?

"Thou art not for the fashion of these times. . ."
"Nay, I care not for their names. . ."
"Call me not fool till heaven hath sent me a fortune."

As you probably guessed, these are quotations from a Shakespearean play (As You Like It) written in approximately 1600. What words or expressions make these sentences unacceptable English for today?

If you object to the above sentences on the grounds that they were written by an Englishman, not an American, you should recall that the first English colonies in America had not been established by 1600. The following quotation is from Captain John Smith's "A Description of New England" written in 1616. (The spelling has been modernized so you can read the passage more easily.)

> For gentlemen, what exercise should more delight them than ranging daily those unknown parts, using fowling and fishing for hunting and hawking? And yet you shall see the wild hawks give you some pleasure in seeing them stoop, six or seven after one another, an hour or two together at the schools of fish in the fair harbors, as those ashore at a fowl. And never trouble nor torment yourselves with watching, mewing, feeding, and attending them; nor kill horse and man with running and crying. See you not a hawk? For hunting also, the woods, lakes, and rivers afford not only chase sufficient for any that delights in that kind of toil or pleasure, but such beasts to hunt that, besides the delicacy of their bodies for food, their skins are so rich as may well recompense thy daily labor with a captain's pay.

Is this language like that found in Shakespeare's plays? Note the form of the question, "See you not a hawk?" If you were to read more of the writing of Elizabethan England and early colonial America, you would soon conclude that the English used in both places is very nearly the same.

English, transplanted to America, did not remain the same, however. The following quotation from the journal of Sarah Kemble Knight, an American-born woman who taught school in Boston, was written nearly a hundred years later (1704) than Captain Smith's "Description" and shows that usage does change. (Here we have kept the original spelling.)

> In about an how'r, or something more, after we left the Swamp, we come to Billinges, where I was to Lodg. My Guide dismounted and very Complasantly help't me down and shewd the door, signing to me with his hand to Go in; which I Gladly did--But had not gone many steps into the Room, ere I was Interogated by a young Lady I understood afterwards was the Eldest daughter of the family, with these, or words to this purpose, (viz.) Law for mee --what in the world brings You here at this time a night?--I never see a woman on the Rode so Dreadfull late, in all the days of my versall life. Who are You? Where are You going?

Language changes with the passage of time; the standards of one period are not necessarily the standards of succeeding ones. You can hardly hope to convince someone that he should use the pronouns thee and thou (in speaking to one person) just because they were the proper forms at some earlier time. Educated Americans simply do not go around saying or writing thou or thee (except within the Society of Friends, the "Quakers"). The modern pronoun is, of course, you. If you recognize and accept the fact that language does change, then you must also accept the fact that standards of usage undergo change. Any description of English usage which is not periodically "brought up to date" cannot provide you with the facts you need. Part of every writer's job is determining what the facts of usage are for his own time and for his own region. No reference book will ever be written that can relieve him of this task completely.

V. Bases for Judgments about Usage

The purpose of Exercise 2 was to drive home the point that decisions about what is and what is not Standard English usage are often difficult to make. The "right-or-wrong" philosophy may simplify your problems in one way, but it does not accurately reflect the facts of usage. Simple solutions are not always the best ones, especially when they are based upon little or no evidence or upon irrelevant criteria. To what authority can you appeal when a problem of usage comes up in your writing or speaking? What criteria can be applied in decisions which involve language usage? In other words, where do the rules of usage come from? First let us look at some of the ways language usage has been justified in the past.

The laws of logic and grammar. What assumptions underlie statements like the following: "It is incorrect to say 'It wasn't me' because the laws of logic demand that the pronouns before and after 'be' have the same number and case." Is language necessarily logical? What does 'logical' mean? You may also have heard the statement that "He doesn't trust nobody" really means "He trusts somebody" because two negatives make a positive. In both instances the "laws of logic" are being used

to condemn expressions which are "incorrect" in certain situations. Must we also judge French as being illogical because Frenchmen say the equivalent of "It is me" ("C'est moi") and use "double negatives" ("Je ne sais pas")? The Hungarian who says the equivalent of "five tree" rather than the more "logical" expression "five trees" will probably not be impressed by your claim that his language is illogical. Language and logic are not the same thing. It is doubtful that any language has ever been completely logical, and even those that claim that language must follow the laws of logic would probably disagree as to what "logical" means.

Another group of scholars often claims that certain English expressions--"split infinitives" ("to quickly leave"), for example--are wrong because they violate the rules of grammar. Usually they support their argument with examples from Latin, pointing out how the "incorrect" English expression violates the rules of Latin grammar. It is easy to see why the Latinist would insist that infinitives (verb forms like to carry, to love, etc.) should not be "split." In Latin, the infinitive forms of the verb are single words: portare 'to carry' and amare 'to love.' Since the re suffix of Latin and the word to in English serve similar functions, it might also seem to follow that their use should be governed by the same set of rules. Thus, having modifiers between the infinitive and its marker (to easily carry or to really love) is clearly ungrammatical in Latin. But is it reasonable to make judgments about usage in one language in terms of the rules of another language? Your own study of English grammar should have shown you that language is the basis for writing rules of grammar, not the other way around. The rules of English grammar are not the same as the rules of Latin grammar. The rules of English grammar arise out of a study of the regularities underlying the structure of English sentences. Attempts to set down "laws of English usage" on the basis of logic or of Latin grammar deny much of what modern science has told us about the nature of language.

Judgments of authorities. At one time it was fashionable to follow the dictates of self-appointed "authorities" who somehow knew what the "right" forms of English were. In recent years such dictators in the area of usage have had less influence. The scientific study of language has shown that dogmatic statements about what is "good" and "bad" usage have no more claim to being true than any other personal opinions have. For example, some authorities have labeled split infinitives as "illiterate" or simply "bad usage." Expressions like "to fully understand," "to patiently wait," "to completely examine," "to strongly favor," and "to actually learn" fall into this category of "bad" English. Yet we find such split infinitives in the writing of educated Americans and Englishmen at all stages of our history. A dogmatic statement such as "It is incorrect to place a modifier between the to and its following infinitive" is something less than accurate. A more reasonable statement about the splitting of infinitives would recognize that such choices are a matter of style, not a matter of absolute right or wrong. The general tendency is not to split them, but under some conditions the split infinitive is desirable.

Of course, there are scholars who qualify as real "authorities" on

matters of usage. They differ in one very important way from the "self-appointed authorities" mentioned above. The genuine authority is a student of usage--that is, one who has made a thorough analysis of what is actually said and written by members of the various social groups which make up our society. On the basis of his analysis, he makes statements about where and when certain debated usages are actually being used. He reports not only who uses them but also under what conditions they are used. These statements are not just personal opinions; they are facts which can be verified by others who analyze the same data. And the authority offers them not as a rule that people must follow, but samples of an accurate description of what people do say and write. The other kind of "authorities" on usage will more than likely continue to voice their opinions about words and expressions which please or displease them, and to insist that they are "right" and "wrong"; and people will remain free to follow their advice. But such statements about good and bad usage must be recognized for what they are: personal opinions which cannot be proved true any more than a statement like "Apple pie is good" can be proved true.

The actual usage of writers and speakers. If logic, the laws of grammar, and the opinions of certain authorities cannot be counted upon to settle your problems of usage, where can the writer or speaker turn for help? The answer sounds almost too simple. It is this: examine the facts of usage. That is, look at what is written and listen to what is actually said by various kinds of people. Then choose from among those possibilities the forms and expressions that you feel suit your purpose best. Let us set up a hypothetical situation to see if it is possible to follow such advice. You are writing an essay for an English assignment, and you notice that you have written the following sentence: "The purpose of the advertisement was to better inform careful buyers." The word better separates to from inform, a clear violation of the "rule" about split infinitives metnioned above. Should you rewrite the sentence or leave it as it is? First try to rewrite it in a way that will keep the same meaning and will not seem awkward. If you cannot do this, what are the dangers of leaving it with the infinitive split? Do you think that your meaning is clear to the reader? Does the sentence sound awkward? Next, try to find out the facts about split infinitives.

One recently published book which reports the facts of English usage, Margaret Bryant's Current American Usage (New York, 1962), gives the following summary under the entry SPLIT INFINITIVE:

> Summary: The split infinitive ('to openly examine,' 'to fully express') occurs more commonly in standard informal writing than in formal writing. Whether to avoid or to use this construction is a matter of style. A split infinitive may eliminate awkwardness or ambiguity or add emphasis or clarity. On the other hand, it is advisable not to place too many words between to and the infinitive as in 'I planned to, after consulting my friend, buy one.' The result is awkwardness.

In view of such a summary, what are you to do about your problem sentence which includes the phrase "to better inform"? Which solution prevents

awkwardness? When you have made your decision, see whether your classmates agree with it.

For problems like the one discussed above, you have no better "authority" than the actual usage of educated people who write and speak English. But obviously you cannot make a detailed analysis of every point of usage that comes up in your writing. Efficiency demands that you settle these problems quickly. Good reference books are at least part of the answer to the problems of usage. Lexicographers and other students of language examine the forms, expressions, and pronunciations of various social groups and report, for instance, which forms or expressions are (or are not) used by the members of these groups. Note that these students of usage do not have the same job as the person who writes a grammar of a particular dialect. The grammarian examines the language and tries to specify the rules which are necessary to account for the sentences of that language. He must go to the student of usage to find out which forms occur in the dialect he has chosen to study. If he is writing a grammar of Standard American English, for example, he must consult the usage experts to find out which forms he must specify in his grammar. The student of usage, then, reports his findings in reference books such as dictionaries, writers' guides, and usage handbooks. Is there a dictionary of usage in your classroom or school library?[1] Another good source of information about usage is an up-to-date English handbook.

More than likely, your dictionary is the first reference you go to when faced with a problem of usage. What sorts of usage labels does your classroom dictionary use? Make certain that you know what these labels stand for. What does the label Colloquial (often Colloq.) mean, for instance, when it is attached to a word in your dictionary or handbook? Look at the introductory section of your dictionary and make certain that you are interpreting this label in the way it was intended to be interpreted. The most recently published unabridged dictionary, Webster's Third New International Dictionary, does not use the word Colloquial as a usage label at all. Very often in the past the label has been misinterpreted to mean "substandard" or some kind of "localism." The label is most often used, of course, to indicate that the particular word or expression is characteristic of speech, not writing. Most of the entries in your dictionary have no usage labels at all. What do you infer from the fact that a word has no usage label? Does it mean that the word is acceptable in Standard English?

The final source of information about usage is your own power of observation. Hearing good models of speech and reading much good writing will go a long way toward giving you a sense of what is and what is not acceptable in various situations. Each writer and speaker should become a close observer of usage if he hopes to develop good judgment in

[1] Two of the better ones are Current American Usage by Margaret Bryant (New York, 1962) and A Dictionary of Contemporary American Usage by Bergen Evans and Cornelia Evans (New York, 1957).

matters of language choice. This is the hardest job of all, and yet it may be the most enjoyable, also. There is a certain satisfaction that comes with knowing the facts of usage; confidence in your own judgment may make your writing and speaking more a pleasure than a pain.

Exercise 3.

Make a list of those expressions in Exercise 2 which caused most difficulty for you and most disagreement among your classmates in assigning the expressions to a particular category. Choose one expression from this list that interests you most, and then locate as much information as you can find about that expression. Try to use several sources such as a dictionary, a handbook of English, a dictionary of usage, and personal observations. For instance, if the word or expression has a usage label attached to it, identify the label and define what the label means. Quote statements from handbooks and usage guides that specify where the expression occurs and where it does not occur. In other words, find out what restrictions there are upon its usage. Finally, find out how, where, and by whom it is used in your own community. You should record information such as (1) the kind of person who used it (that is, a teenager, an old man, etc.), (2) the educational level of the person, (3) the situation in which it was said or written, and (4) the occupation of the speaker.

After you have gathered your facts, write a summary about the status of the expression you chose to study. Explain when and where you would use it confidently in writing or speech. Note any contradictions in the sources you used. Make certain that your summary does not contain moral judgments about the "goodness" or "badness" of the expression. Your report should contain verifiable facts about its actual use, restrictions on its use, taboos, and so forth. Your teacher may want you to hand in the summary, or ask you to give a short talk summarizing your findings. The information you and your classmates gather could serve as a kind of usage manual for your class.

VI. Characteristics of a Mature Attitude Toward Usage

If a person adopts a philosophy of language like the one we have been describing, how will he answer the questions asked at the very beginning of the discussion? The questions were "Should I use this expression in this particular situation?" and "Is this good (= effective) English?" First of all, he will recognize that there are no simple answers to these two questions. Each usage problem that comes up must be settled separately, according to the facts of actual usage. This much we can say about the mature person's solutions to problems of usage: His decisions will be characterized by (1) recognition of the complexity and range of tolerance within Standard American English, (2) knowledge of the facts of English usage (especially the debated points), and (3) acceptance of the responsibility to be his own arbiter in matters of usage.

The linguistically sophisticated person sees Standard American English as a broad range of differing practices that need to be sorted out into several general categories which overlap one another. He makes his choices in accordance with the situation--that is, in accordance with his subject, his audience, and his purpose in speaking or writing. He knows which forms and expressions are permissible within the range of Standard American English, and he selects from among these possibilities when the situation requires that he use Standard English. But he does not equate Substandard English (that is, the dialects which differ in some ways from the prestige dialect in a particular region) with "bad" English, and assign some moral or intellectual superiority to the standard or prestige dialect. He recognizes that, linguistically speaking, clum is as "good" as climbed, but he also knows that educated and influential members of social groups within his society use the latter, not the former. He knows that it is possible to communicate effectively in substandard dialects (witness Huck's success), but he recognizes the wider usefulness of Standard Written English, since there are fewer regional and national differences within this dialect. Finally, he knows and accepts the idea that, even though he can get facts about usage from many sources, ultimately he must decide for himself what forms he will use. His success as a speaker or writer depends upon the soundness of his judgment in making these choices.

Exercise 4.

Part A: Write an extended definition of "good English." Do not define the word good as being synonymous with standard. Include examples to illustrate points that may seem unclear.

Part B: Criticize the following definition of "good English" which is taken from a book about English usage: "Good English is that form of speech which is appropriate to the purpose of the speaker, true to the language as it is, and comfortable to speaker and listener. It is the product of custom, neither cramped by rule nor freed from all restraint; it is never fixed, but changes with the organic life of the language." Is this definition in agreement with the philosophy of language we have been discussing? Does this definition include both standard and substandard dialects? In your opinion, what is good (or bad) about this definition?

Part C: The subject of usage is a major problem of the lexicographer, the one who makes dictionaries. After the publication of Webster's Third New International Dictionary in 1961, the role of the dictionary in matters of usage was hotly debated. One group called upon the dictionary writer to determine what the proper uses of words should be; the other group claimed that "lexicographers do not form language, but simply register it." If you agree with the philosophy stated in this unit, which side would you be on in this debate? Finally, write a brief paragraph giving your reasons for being on one side of the issue or the other.